

# Is There a Jewish Vote?

Arthur M. Klebanoff

BY NOW it is widely acknowledged that Jews were the critical group in the New York mayoral election last November, but it is not immediately apparent why this was so. Jews, after all, had not given extraordinary support to John Lindsay when he first ran for mayor in 1965, and since then Lindsay's gains among Negroes, Puerto Ricans, and Manhattan whites might have been expected to offset his almost certain loss of many of his original supporters. Working in Lindsay's favor, too, was the fact that in 1969 fewer votes were needed to win than in 1965, due both to an overall decline in citywide registration and to the presence on the ballot of a third candidate with a major party designation.

In order to discover why Lindsay did in fact need the Jewish vote we must first recall the election of 1965: in that campaign, Lindsay's support—outside of Manhattan—was remarkably similar to that of his Conservative opponent, William F. Buckley. As the following table shows, in the districts where Buckley ran strongly, Lindsay ran comfortably, frequently relegating the Democratic mayoral candidate, Abraham Beame, to third place.

17 Highest Percentage  
Buckley Assembly Districts, 1965  
(New York City—68 Assembly Districts)\*

|         | %    |                        |
|---------|------|------------------------|
| Lindsay | 46.0 |                        |
| Beame   | 30.6 |                        |
| Buckley | 23.4 | Lindsay plurality 15.4 |

These districts included conservative sections of the Northeast Bronx, Italian areas in Brooklyn, and German and Irish Catholic portions of Queens; not one of them was in Manhattan, and none had a noticeable number of Negroes, Puerto Ricans, or Jews. The vote garnered by Lindsay in these areas was nearly exclusively white and Catholic, and, more often than not, Italian. In 1965, Buckley received his lowest percentage of votes in the predominantly Negro and Puerto Rican areas of the city, the only exception being four districts on the East and West Side of Manhattan. And Lindsay's performance in these dis-

tricts, though much higher than Buckley's, was still not enough to outdraw Beame.

17 Lowest Percentage  
Buckley Assembly Districts, 1965

|         | %    |                      |
|---------|------|----------------------|
| Lindsay | 42.2 |                      |
| Beame   | 53.5 |                      |
| Buckley | 4.3  | Beame plurality 11.3 |

The June 1969 primaries, however, heralded a rather remarkable reversal of the 1965 pattern: Lindsay, in the Republican primary, and Badillo, in the Democratic primary, consistently carried the lowest-percentage Buckley districts while Marchi and Procaccino carried all the highest-percentage Buckley districts. By early July, then, it seemed safe to assume that Lindsay would gain more ground over his 1965 performance in the liberally-based assembly districts than he would lose in the conservatively-based districts. The problem was that the conservatively-based assembly districts turned out many more voters than the liberal ones. To judge from well-established voting patterns, turnout in the seventeen low Buckley districts was likely to be only slightly more than half the turnout in the seventeen high Buckley districts, and this meant that Lindsay would have to gain twice as many votes in his liberal districts as he lost in his conservative districts simply to maintain his 1965 plurality.

All this is another way of saying that Lindsay would not have needed the Jews this year if Negroes and Puerto Ricans could have been counted on to vote in large numbers. But Negro and Puerto Rican political participation in New York City is little better than dismal: exhaustive checks of population data against registration data place the percentage of eligible Negroes registered at no more than 40 per cent, and of eligible Puerto Ricans registered at 30 per cent, compared with a white participation rate of at least 60 per cent of eligibles (and with a Negro participation rate

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\* New York City politics has operated under three sets of assembly-district lines in the past five years. For the purposes of this essay, all references are to votes in terms of the current district lines. In the course of the campaign, at the author's direction, prior voting was reconstituted at the election-district level and voting returns prior to 1966 were aggregated into current assembly-district boundaries.



in the deep South which is rapidly climbing past 60 per cent). In New York City, election districts throughout Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant and the South Bronx have less than a fifth of their eligible voters registered. As part of a registration effort, volunteers compared lists of tenants in city housing projects with lists of enrolled voters—project after project showed less than 40 per cent of its adults registered to vote. (The projects, with boards of registry a mere elevator ride away, are where one would expect the highest participation rates in the community.)

The evidence from 1968 was that the registration situation for Negroes and Puerto Ricans was deteriorating. Although a major registration drive in the summer of 1964 brought more than 150,000 first-time Negro and Puerto Rican voters to the polls, a similar effort in the summer of 1968, located in the community centers themselves rather than in the sometimes hostile firehouses, netted fewer than 25,000 new voters. In the national election of November 1968, citywide voter turnout was off more than 10 per cent from the previous Presidential election, but in Negro areas throughout the city, turnout was down more than 25 per cent. Since New York election law requires a voter to re-register if he fails to vote in two consecutive elections, and since few indeed turned out in 1967, more than 100,000 Negro and Puerto Rican voters would have had to re-register to be able to vote for John Lindsay. In addition to these unregistered Negroes and Puerto Ricans, there was the problem of Manhattan whites, who have the lowest percentage of eligibles registered of the five boroughs. In 1969 there were at least 110,000 unregistered voters on Manhattan's West Side, and another 90,000 on the East Side. One volunteer project, which matched a special telephone directory of addresses with the Enrolled List of Voters, produced the names of 30,000 unregistered voters in one West Side assembly district alone.

Thus it turned out that the most likely Lindsay supporters were disproportionately to be found *outside* the electorate. Yet past experience indicated that getting these supporters registered would not net a substantial number of Lindsay votes: the most optimistic estimate assumed that Lindsay could gain not more than 25 votes for every 100 registered. The reasoning behind this seemingly low figure is as follows: for every 100 new registrants, only 80 could be expected to turn out to vote; out of the 80, 5 votes would be invalidated, 50 would go to Lindsay, and 25 to his opponents—and in this case, since those most favorable to Lindsay would most probably be nominal Democrats, almost all the opposition votes would have gone to Procaccino. On the other hand, and according to the same reasoning, a change of 13 registered votes from Procaccino to Lindsay, or of 26 votes from Procaccino or Marchi to Lindsay, would have a greater impact than

registering 100 new voters; and since it is not more difficult to change a voter's mind than it is to register and turn out a new voter, Lindsay logically turned his attention to those voters already registered.

THE LINDSAY campaign, then, set out to find the group of voters whose votes could be switched in large enough numbers to re-elect the Mayor. The search depended on but one assumption—that the most important thing to know about a voter was how he voted in other elections. Votes of the previous five years were rated and weighed on the basis of their possible meaning in determining a voter's attitude toward Lindsay in 1969. Thus, it was considered important that Paul O'Dwyer had run especially well in the Democratic Senate primary in 1968; that the Liberal party line had shown consistent strength for Lindsay in 1965, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., in 1966, and Jacob Javits in 1968; and that Lindsay and Herman Badillo had done well in the 1969 primary. With each of the city's 5,200 election districts rated and arrayed geographically, the campaign set about trying to locate the people Lindsay was neither certain to win nor certain to lose.

As expected, those certain to be for Lindsay were almost exclusively Manhattan whites and Negroes and Puerto Ricans across the city, located primarily in those seventeen assembly districts where William F. Buckley had run worst in 1965—and where Lindsay, too, had run behind the Democratic opposition. The campaign assumed that here the 1965 showing would be reversed. Also as expected, those districts certain to oppose Lindsay were almost exclusively white Catholic areas outside Manhattan—the seventeen assembly districts where Buckley, and Lindsay, had run best in 1965—and again, the campaign assumed that the 1965 showing would be reversed.

The major focus of the campaign, therefore, was on those districts neither highly likely nor highly unlikely to vote for Lindsay, those districts neither largely Negro and Puerto Rican nor largely white Catholic. These middle districts contained most of New York City's Jews, and were themselves largely Jewish in composition.

BEFORE LOOKING closely at this middle group of districts and the Jews within them, we should first see whether the results of the election confirmed the assumptions of the campaign.

The seventeen best Buckley assembly districts, which Lindsay had carried handily in 1965, deserted him in 1969:

*17 Highest Percentage  
Buckley Assembly Districts, 1969*

|                                  | %    |
|----------------------------------|------|
| Lindsay                          | 25.1 |
| Procaccino                       | 37.9 |
| Marchi                           | 37.0 |
| <i>Procaccino plurality 12.8</i> |      |



Lindsay's percentage of the vote was down more than twenty points from 1965, his plurality over the Democratic candidate down nearly thirty percentage points. If there was anything good to be said about the Lindsay showing in these districts, it was that Marchi's performance lowered the Procaccino plurality over Lindsay to less than thirteen percentage points.

The seventeen worst Buckley assembly districts which Lindsay had lost to Beame in 1965 gave him nearly two-thirds of their vote, and this without Lindsay having the benefit of a major party line:

*17 Lowest Percentage  
Buckley Assembly Districts, 1969*

|            | %    |                               |
|------------|------|-------------------------------|
| Lindsay    | 64.9 |                               |
| Procaccino | 25.8 |                               |
| Marchi     | 9.3  | <i>Lindsay plurality 39.1</i> |

Lindsay's percentage in these districts was up more than twenty points over his 1965 showing, his plurality over the Democratic candidate up an astounding fifty percentage points. Marchi's slight improvement over the Buckley showing seems traceable to Republican-line voters who would not desert the party nominee.

Thus, Lindsay did gain more percentage strength in the worst Buckley areas than he lost in the best Buckley areas, and the tally of the raw vote confirmed the campaign assumption that he needed that differential to maintain his 1965 plurality. The seventeen best Buckley assembly districts cast 702,000 votes in the 1969 election, the seventeen worst Buckley districts only 380,000. Turnout patterns even suggested that participation of registered Negro voters abnormally lagged behind that of white registered voters.

The Lindsay campaign strategy was aimed directly at people who on the basis of past voting performances were unlikely to vote overwhelmingly for or against him. This quickly became a strategy aimed at those people who "vote Jewish," and since most people who vote Jewish are Jewish, a strategy aimed at Jews. The process is critically different from singling out Jews as the key ethnic group. Campaigns are aimed at voters who happen to be people, rather than at people who happen to be voters. Most of the voters Lindsay needed to recruit to his side were Jewish, but Lindsay had to recruit others as well, and some Jews (Manhattan Jews outside Washington Heights and the Lower East Side) had already been won, just as others (the Jewish Defense League, for example) had already been lost.

In fact even if they had wanted to, the Lindsay people could not have run a particularly well-organized effort aimed only at Jews because no one knows how many Jews live in New York City, let alone how many live in a particular neighborhood. The current population estimate of the number of Jews in New York City was calculated

in 1961 on the basis of the number of children absent from school on Yom Kippur; whether this figure bears any relation at all to the Jewish population in the city then or now is sheer speculation, and with Yom Kippur now a school holiday, no new estimates of Jewish population have been undertaken. The neighborhood estimates derived from the 1961 study are also unreliable: Jewish population was overstated in heavily Jewish areas (where Christian families tended to keep their children home from school on Yom Kippur as well) and understated in areas of low Jewish concentration (where Jewish parents tended to send their children to school on Yom Kippur if most other children were attending).

Indeed, ethnic statistics for *all* local areas are next to useless. To cite but one example: two studies of assembly-district polling, one to measure Negro percentage in the electorate, the other to measure Jewish percentage, came up with incompatible results—district after district totalled 80 per cent Jewish and 40 per cent Negro! Richard Aurelio, Lindsay's astute campaign manager, had to spend much of his time early in the campaign listening to local workers arguing about whether their district was 20 or 80 per cent Jewish.

**B**UT EVEN IF the Census did inquire about a person's religion (which it does not), or greatly improved its questions on ethnic background, a politician would still be without the information he needs to plan a campaign, since no census can be set up to measure the key factor: the degree of ethnicity among *voters*. The only thing the electorate of a city has in common with the population is a similar mailing address. In New York everyone recognized that Jews must be a larger percentage of the electorate than they were of the adult population; all political observations confirmed that Jews registered and voted in greater numbers than other New Yorkers. Yet estimates of Jews as a percentage of the New York City electorate varied wildly from less than 30 per cent to more than 40 per cent. Under the circumstances, it seems somewhat naive to speak of "the Jewish vote," though commentators continue to use the term, for if the Lindsay campaign demonstrated anything clearly, it demonstrated that there are many Jewish votes, and many kinds of Jewish voters. (Procaccino's campaign was managed by a Jew and Lindsay's by an Italian, and in neither case did the manager deliver his own "ethnics.") The question for the campaign, therefore, was not simply "the Jewish voter," it was rather a particular kind of Jewish voter, a voter who had preferred Robert Wagner to Procaccino in the Democratic primary, who had voted against the civilian review board but not with the intensity of its staunchest critics, a voter who had all along maintained a strong tie to the political magic of Jacob Javits.



It was this voter that John Lindsay successfully courted in a gruelling campaign in Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Queens, this voter who left Lindsay with a smaller percentage than he had won in 1965, but with a similar plurality, as shown in the following tables comparing the 1965 and 1969 votes in the crucial middle districts:

*34 Middle Percentage  
Buckley Assembly Districts, 1965*

|         | %    |                              |
|---------|------|------------------------------|
| Lindsay | 48.6 |                              |
| Beame   | 39.4 |                              |
| Buckley | 12.0 | <i>Lindsay plurality 9.2</i> |

*The Same Districts, 1969*

|            | %    |                              |
|------------|------|------------------------------|
| Lindsay    | 44.1 |                              |
| Procaccino | 36.1 |                              |
| Marchi     | 19.8 | <i>Lindsay plurality 8.0</i> |

Lindsay had executed a rather unlikely trade. He had moved Left through the political spectrum, yet had managed to back up into the great middle of the New York City electorate. In the process he forced Procaccino out of that middle, and in so doing took the election away from him. Lindsay did win high pluralities from rich whites and poor Negroes and Puerto Ricans, but that pattern had been established well before the general election campaign began. The focus of the campaign, as we have seen, was on those who were not rich, Negro, Puerto Rican, or Catholic—in other words, on those districts which were Jewish and which voted Jewish, and this is where the campaign was won.

While it is virtually impossible to construct an aggregate of the Jewish vote citywide, one can nonetheless learn a great deal from individual Jewish districts. To illustrate the diversity of voting patterns in Jewish areas, let us examine three assembly districts with largely Jewish electorates: the 25th assembly district in Queens; the 76th assembly district in the Bronx; and the 73rd assembly district in Manhattan. If the districts were ranked by median income, the 25th A.D. would be first, but the spread between the 25th and the 76th would not be appreciable enough to push either district out of the middle class. The 73rd has the lowest percentage of Jews—there are a good many Greeks in the area—but all three districts have populations which overwhelmingly “vote Jewish.” Their neighborhood names—Grand Concourse, Kew Gardens, Washington Heights—have resonance for a good many Jews now living beyond the city limits in Westchester or Long Island.

All three of these districts gave between 45 and 50 per cent of their votes to John Lindsay in 1969, suggesting a *prima facie* case for a consistent Jewish voting pattern. However, the districts followed very different paths to arrive at

their 1969 Lindsay percentage, and the paths they followed do *not* suggest a patterned Jewish vote. Lindsay scored his highest plurality—eighteen percentage points—in the 25th, yet this was a decline from his 1965 plurality over Beame. Lindsay's lowest plurality—seven percentage points over Procaccino—was in the 76th, yet this represented a gain of nearly thirty percentage points over his 1965 showing, the strongest gain registered in the three assembly districts. In 1965, Lindsay carried the 25th by nearly twenty percentage points, ran even with Beame in the 73rd, and lost the 76th by twenty percentage points—a symmetrical if not particularly patterned showing.

But have these three assembly districts always voted similarly? In the 1966 gubernatorial election, Rockefeller fashioned a ten-percentage-point victory over Frank O'Connor in the 25th A.D. and lost badly in both the 73rd and 76th. The 25th also came within ten percentage points of endorsing the civilian review board, while the referendum was losing by thirty percentage points in both the 73rd and 76th. Yet in the 1965 Democratic mayoral primary, the 25th gave nearly half its vote to Beame, the organization candidate, while Paul Screvane won comfortably in the 73rd; and the 25th nearly pushed Republican Louis Lefkowitz past Wagner in the 1961 mayoral election which Wagner won by a two-to-one margin in the 73rd and a three-to-one margin in the 76th.

The vote given to Jewish candidates shows true distinctions in the Jewish voter. The 25th was the only one of the three districts to move dramatically in Lefkowitz's favor in 1961. Although the most formidable Jewish vote-getter, Jacob Javits, in his 1962 Senate race pulled substantially better than Lefkowitz had in all three districts, he still lost the 76th by nearly seven percentage points. Yet of the three districts, it was the 76th which gave Beame his highest percentage in the 1965 mayoral primary and gave a plurality of its votes to Joseph Resnick in the 1968 Democratic Senate primary, while Paul O'Dwyer won easily in the 25th and 73rd. Again, the 76th gave Javits a higher percentage of the vote in 1968 than it did in 1962, while Javits's percentage declined in the 73rd and 25th.

In the 1969 Democratic mayoral primary, Badillo and Procaccino each gained 25 per cent of the vote in each of the three districts, and Lindsay beat Marchi by nearly identical nine-percentage-point margins in the three districts. (Congressman James Scheuer, who also entered the primary, more than doubled his next highest assembly-district total with 20 per cent of the vote in the 76th.)

WHAT WAS IT, then, that these three districts had in common? Simply that with their past votes weighed and rated on comparable indices, all three districts were equally prone to vote for Lindsay in 1969. The Lind-



say campaign operated on the assumption that Lindsay would score roughly the same percentage in each of these districts, and that the critical question of the campaign was how high that percentage could be. Lindsay did not chase after a monolithic Jewish vote which had moved in unison on scores of liberal issues in the past, for no such Jewish vote existed. Rather, he pursued a bloc of voters, many of whom were Jewish, whose variegated voting histories suggested in sum a vote potentially large enough to close any likely gap between himself and Procaccino.

Of course, in deciding as it did to concentrate on these voters, the Lindsay campaign had to operate on the critical assumption that in a quarter of the city covering most of Manhattan and most Negroes and Puerto Ricans in the boroughs, the outcome had been decided in Lindsay's favor before the campaign began, and that in another quarter of the city, covering white Catholic areas in the boroughs, Lindsay had lost badly before the campaign began. By concentrating on the re-

maining half of the city, Lindsay undoubtedly sacrificed some gains he could otherwise have made. Even with the aid of "the Manhattan Arrangement," Lindsay ran consistently lower among Manhattan whites than he had in 1965. By spending more time in Manhattan, Lindsay might well have altered that figure, just as he might have increased the turnout of Negroes and Puerto Ricans by spending more time in their neighborhoods. But in either effort he might well have lost the election. Recognizing this, Lindsay chose to spend his time elsewhere, in the pursuit of voters many of whom were Jewish, and those voters responded in much the same way they had responded to Lindsay in 1965. What is truly remarkable about the 1969 election is that great swings at the fringes of the electorate ended up having little impact at the center. As many observers had guessed long before the political year began, John Lindsay simply came closer to representing the center of New York City than either John Marchi or Mario Procaccino.

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